

McBride's "Practical Folk Medicine of Hawaii,"
and opinions about
Tacca hawaiiensis versus Tacca leontopetaloides
and other taxa

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The occasion for printing a review of a botanical or other work gives us the opportunity not only to express our opinions regarding it, but to discuss the identifications of any plants involved. Some discrepancy in the use of names arises from our tendency to be "splitters," emphasizing the differences in plants; while the author may tend to be a "lumper," emphasizing the likenesses in plants.

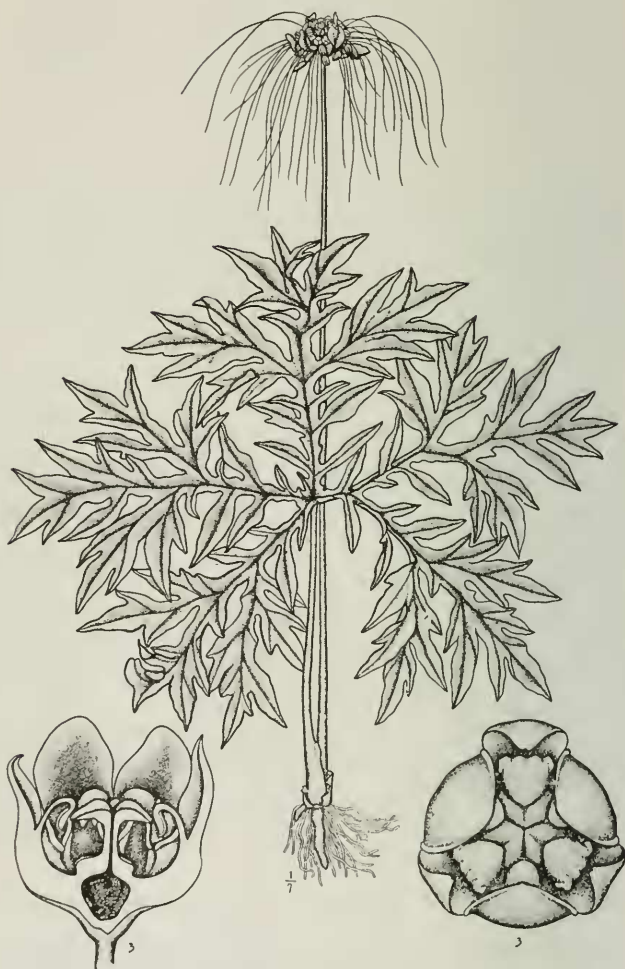
L. Richard McBride, former Ranger of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park and presently Lecturer at Kilauea Military Camp, has authored his sixth book: "Practical Folk Medicine of Hawaii." This book of 104 pages is illustrated with 84 figures, over half of plants used by the ancient kahunalapa'au, or medicine man. McBride, under one of his nine headings, warns the reader that his "doctor be consulted" before using a home remedy. Hence the book is not a danger to health and even life of the gullible reader as is the disaster authored by Kaalakama-na and Akina in 1922 and unfortunately recently reprinted. Pages 22 through 75 deal primarily with the plants, or simples, and the parts used; and their descriptions and habitats. McBride gives the plants used their vernacular and, according to his judgement, their scientific names. As mentioned above, we as "splitters" prefer such changes be made as Allium, on page 23; Pariti, p. 34; citrifolia, p. 55; gaudichaudii, p. 58; and quinquefolia, p. 62. The illustration for page 39 appears to be just a printer's error. A discussion of "Ailments commonly Treated in Hawaii Folk Medicine" follows the botanical part of the book.

Three scientific names used by the author intrigue us:

McBride (p. 57) used for our ohia lehua, Metrosideros collina subsp. polymorpha, a trinomial popularised by J.F. Rock over fifty years ago. As we have no incontestable proof that this is correct, we stubbornly still use our catchall "M. polymorpha Gaud., s. l.," for most of these common Hawaiian trees. We have collected Metrosideros taxa in the wild in Fiji, and both in the wild and as a beautiful street tree in New Zealand. Should we relegate all such ohia lehua to mere subordinate taxa of M. collina (J.R. & G. Forst.) Gray, native to distant Tahiti? They don't look

TACCACEAE

TACCA FAMILY

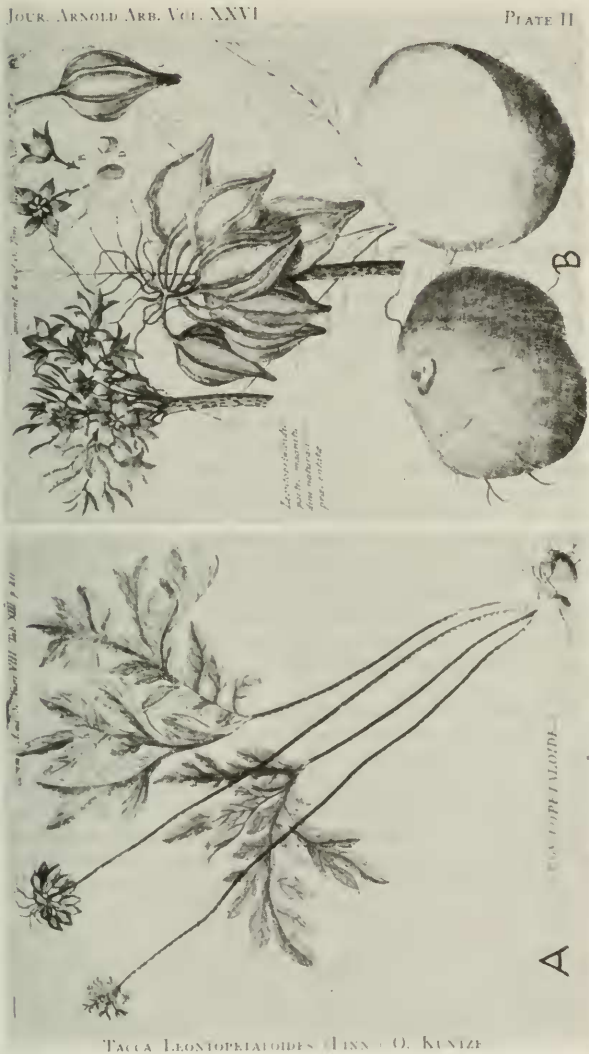


TACCA HAWAIIENSIS Limpricht f.
(Original)

(Described on preceding page)

(Otto DeGener, 11/31/32)

(Kapoho, Hawaii)



ANNAN(n), P. Comment. Acad. Sci. Petrop.
8: Pl. 13. 1741, after Merrill

it. That the seeds are wind-disseminated is not sufficiently convincing for us to change our opinion. We are eagerly awaiting a monograph of the genus based, not on casual observation of herbarium sheets, but on facts gleaned with the use of the most recent tools of Science.

"Solanum nigrum" (p. 67), a binomial we have followed for years, is evidently a misidentification. Our popolo is Solanum nodiflorum subsp. nutans R.J. Henderson (1974).

In the Flora Hawaiiensis for November 3, 1932 one of us printed an illustrated description of the local pia he had collected at Kapoho, Island of Hawaii, as Tacca hawaiiensis Limprecht f. Today most workers equate this species with T. leontopetaloides (L.) Ktze., based on a specimen, according to Linnaeus (Sp. Pl. 313. 1753), with its "Habitat in India." In fact, Linnaeus refers his binomial to the description and illustrations published by Amman(n) in 1741. As this work is generally unavailable, E.D. Merrill reprinted the Amman(n) plates in the Journ. Arn. Arb. 26: Plate II. 1945. To us, who have had the Hawaiian pia growing in our Mokuleia garden for about forty years and have collected Tacca species in the Hawaiian and Fiji Islands since, T. hawaiiensis and T. leontopetaloides are not conspecific at all but distinct. As pictures can be read in any language, we here dispense with repeating long, technical descriptions in foreign languages. After comparing the plates presently show, doubters can compare original published descriptions for themselves.

"Practical Folk Medicine of Hawaii," selling for \$4.50 per copy, caters to the resident and tourist interested in Hawaiiana and local plants in general; not so much to the professional botanist. It is of value to workers in pharmacology of the world as it gives them a clue as to which Hawaiian plants deserve assay. Who knows what medicinal discoveries the kahunalapa'au has made, and how modern chemists may improve on them to enhance their efficacy?